YOU'RE REALLY CLOSE TO SHISUI.
IS THAT HOW IT LOOKS TO YOU?
YES?
Chapter 77: Trade Site
AH.
I SHOULD'VE ASKED HER WHAT HER GOAL IN ALL THIS WAS.

EH.
OH WELL.
I WOULDN'T EXPECT HER TO TRY ANYWAY.
I'M LEAVING.
THERE ARE GUARDS STATIONED OUTSIDE. DON'T EVEN THINK OF TRYING TO RUN OFF.
AH!
MORNING, MAOMAO!

DAAAZE...
WHAT, HUH? WHY ARE THERE GUARDS? WHAT'S YOUR DEAL?
WHAT'S THE PUNK DOING HERE?
!
SHWP
SHWP
SHWP
ANNOTATED ON EVERY SINGLE PAGE!
IS THIS AN APOTHE-CARY'S GUIDE...
TO CONCOCTING DRUGS FROM FOREIGN LANDS?!

AREN'T YOU GOING TO EAT, MAOMAO?
FWUMP
CLINK
I CAN EAT LATER.
SWSH

EESH. AIN'T YOU ALL IMPOR-TANT.
NOM NOM
GULP
LATER.
AND CHANGE YOUR CLOTHES?
KYOU-U, IF YOU'VE FINISHED EATING, GO AHEAD AND PUT AWAY YOUR BOWLS.
HUH? HOW COME?
THE SERVANTS CAN DO ALL THAT STUFF.
HEH
REMINDS ME OF LADY SHENMEI.
SHENMEI? WHO'S THAT?

DUN
SO YOU CAN'T DO ANYTHING WITHOUT SERVANTS HELPING YOU, HM?
STILL SUCH A KID.
GREW UP WITH A SILVER SPOON, DID HE?
THEY HAVE THE SAYING, "ALL THAT'S FAIR MUST FADE."
FAR TO THE EAST...
I CAN DO IT MYSELF!
HMPH!
NO MATTER HOW IMPORTANT A FAMILY IS, IT'LL FALL TO RUIN SOME DAY.
ESSENTIALLY MEANING, NO MATTER HOW GRAND OR STRONG YOU ARE, AGE WILL TAKE THAT AWAY EVENTUALLY.

MAOMAO, WHERE'S YOUR HAIRPIN FROM YESTER-DAY?
I LEFT IT ON THE BED.
AH, HERE IT IS.
MAOMAO, THIS IS SUCH A PRECIOUS HAIRPIN. YOU SHOULD TAKE BETTER CARE OF IT.
WOULD IT SELL FOR A LOT?
THAT'S... NOT THE POINT.
OTHERWISE, SOMEONE MAY NICK IT AND SELL IT OFF.

AND IF ALL THAT WERE TO HAPPEN, WHOEVER GAVE IT TO YOU MIGHT LEARN IT WAS SOLD OFF.
I MEANT SO MUCH SKILL AND HANDIWORK WENT INTO MAKING IT.
SO MUCH SO THAT A SPECIALIST COULD TELL YOU WHICH CRAFTSMAN ACTUALLY MADE IT.
KNOWING THAT, YOU COULD FIND OUT WHO ORDERED IT TO BEGIN WITH.
...THAT WOULD BE BAD. I CAN'T EVER SELL IT OFF.
I GUESS YOUR ONLY OPTION LEFT IS TO TAKE CARE OF IT.
COME ON, LET'S GET YOU CHANGED, SHALL WE?
FINE.
COULD YOU HAVE IT PROCESSED FOR RAW MATERIALS?
WOULDN'T THAT BE A WASTE?

THERE.
PERFECT.
I THINK IT'S JUST SHORT...
HMMM
YOU'RE REALLY GOOD AT THIS.
I HAD TO BE.
IF I WERE TOO SLOW, I'D BE BEATEN.

IT WAS REALLY SCARY.
I HAD TO LEARN HOW TO GIVE GOOD MASSAGES, TOO.
OTHERWISE I'D HAVE SCALDING WATER POURED OVER ME.
SO...
I'M TALKING ABOUT MY MOTHER.
WHO ELSE?
AN AWFUL MASTER, SOUNDS LIKE.
AT LEAST THE OLD BROTHEL MADAM KNEW HOW TO BEAT IN MODER-ATION.
HEH HEH

I'LL BE HEADING OUT TODAY, TOO!
I REALLY NEED YOU TO BEHAVE YOURSELF, MAOMAO.
HER OWN MOTHER POURED SCALDING WATER OVER HER? REALLY?
WELL... I SUPPOSE SOME MOTHERS CUT OFF THEIR CHILD'S PINKIE, INSTEAD.

I'VE BEEN SITTING ALL DAY. I'M SORE.
YAWN...
IT'S BEEN... SIX HOURS SINCE SHISUI LEFT?
BUT I CAN'T GO OUTSIDE AS LONG AS THE GUARDS ARE HERE.

HM?
AT LEAST THE TOP FLOOR HAS A NICE ENOUGH VIEW.
JUST AT THE SIDE. IS IT BECAUSE IT'S IN THE STOREHOUSE'S SHADOW?
ONE SECTION OVER THERE HASN'T EVEN RIPENED.
MOST OF THE VISIBLE RICE FIELDS HAVE BEEN HARVESTED, BUT...
IT SHOULDN'T BE A LACK OF NOURISHMENT.
THE REST OF THE FIELD IS PERFECTLY HARVESTED, SO...
MENTIONED SOMETHING ABOUT SOME AREAS WHERE THE RICE DOESN'T GROW VERY WELL.
THAT REMINDS ME. THOSE KIDS AT THE FESTIVAL ...
うんうん

BANG
GAH!
...COULD IT BE...?
AND YET, SQUARES OF RICE REMAIN HIDDEN IN THE BUILDING'S SHADOW.
WHAT'CHA DOING?
TAP
TAP
I ALMOST FELL RIGHT THROUGH.
OW!
OW, OWOW!
GRND
GRND
GRND
TRY TO BE A BIT QUIETER, WOULD YOU?

HEY! WHY'RE YOU LOOKIN' OUTSIDE?
NO IDEA.
HEY, WHERE'D SIS GO?
WHY DIDN'T YOU ASK HER?

SO NOT THAT ONE?
NAH. DON'T WANT MICE GETTING IN.
THE CHIEF'S SUCH A CHEAPSKATE, WON'T EVEN PAY TO HAVE IT TORN DOWN.

TELL ME, DO YOU KNOW WHAT THAT FANCY-LOOKING BUILDING THERE IS?
AH, THE VILLAGE CHIEF'S STORE-HOUSE?
WELL, THE CHIEF ONLY USES OTHER ONES WITH HIGHER FLOORS.

SHOULD BE AROUND HERE.
FLIP
FLIP
?
TAP
TAP
TAP
HMM...
MICE?

THOUGHT IT'D KEEP ME NICE AND DOCILE.
LEAVING ME WITH ALL THESE BOOKS TO PORE THROUGH, I BET THE TWO OF THEM...

I SIMPLY CAN'T!
BUT, HOW COULD I BEAR TO SIT ON MY HANDS SEEING THIS?
WHUH? WHAT— HUH?
WHAT'S WITH THE FACE?
YOU WANNA GO OUT THERE?
CAN I?!
HEH
'COURSE YOU CAN.

DOUBT
AND HOW DO I DO THAT?
...
SHISUI'S ROOM?
THISSA WAY!
HE SURE KNOWS A LOT ABOUT THE VILLAGE AND THIS INN BOTH. HAS HE BEEN STAYING HERE FOR A LONG TIME?
RIGHT HERE!

DRAG...
DRAG...
HELP ME PUSH IT!
THE ROOMS ARE MEANT TO BE DIVIDED HOWEVER YOU WANT.
THIS ONE'S CONNECTED TO THE NEXT ROOM OVER.
IS THERE NOT ANOTHER CABINET ON THE OTHER SIDE?
YEAH, BUT THAT'S MY ROOM. ALREADY MOVED IT.
WAS THINKING I'D JUMP OUT AND SURPRISE SIS, BUT...
THIS ONE WAS IN THE WAY.

BRUSHES AND PAPERS LITTER THE FLOOR.
HE HAS A THING FOR PAINTING, DOES HE?
CRRK...
EXCEPT FOR A BIG DOOR IN PLACE OF THE DISPLAY WINDOW.
A BEDROOM AND A SITTING ROOM.
THE GENERAL LAYOUT IS THE SAME.
C'MERE! C'MON!

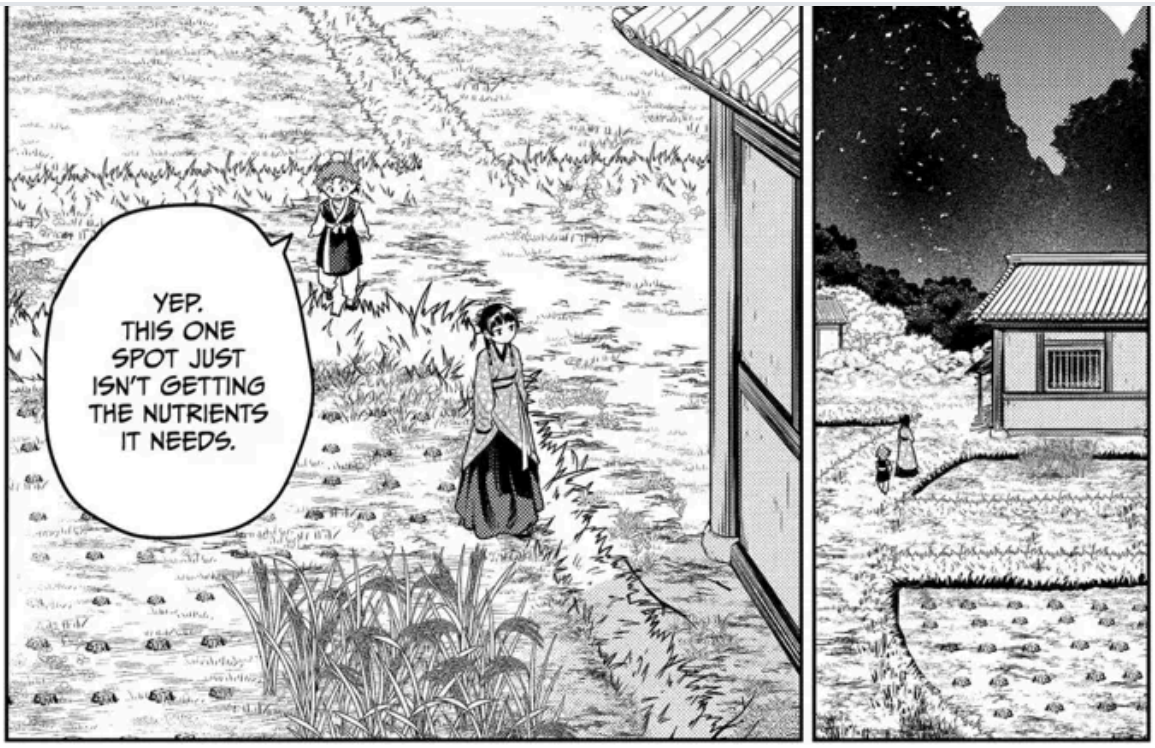
YOU CAN GET TO THIS BALCONY FROM MY ROOM.

HEH HEH
EVERYONE ELSE'S ALWAYS GOT SOME STUDYING TO DO OR SOMETHING.
SO HE MAKES A HABIT OF BREAKING OUT.

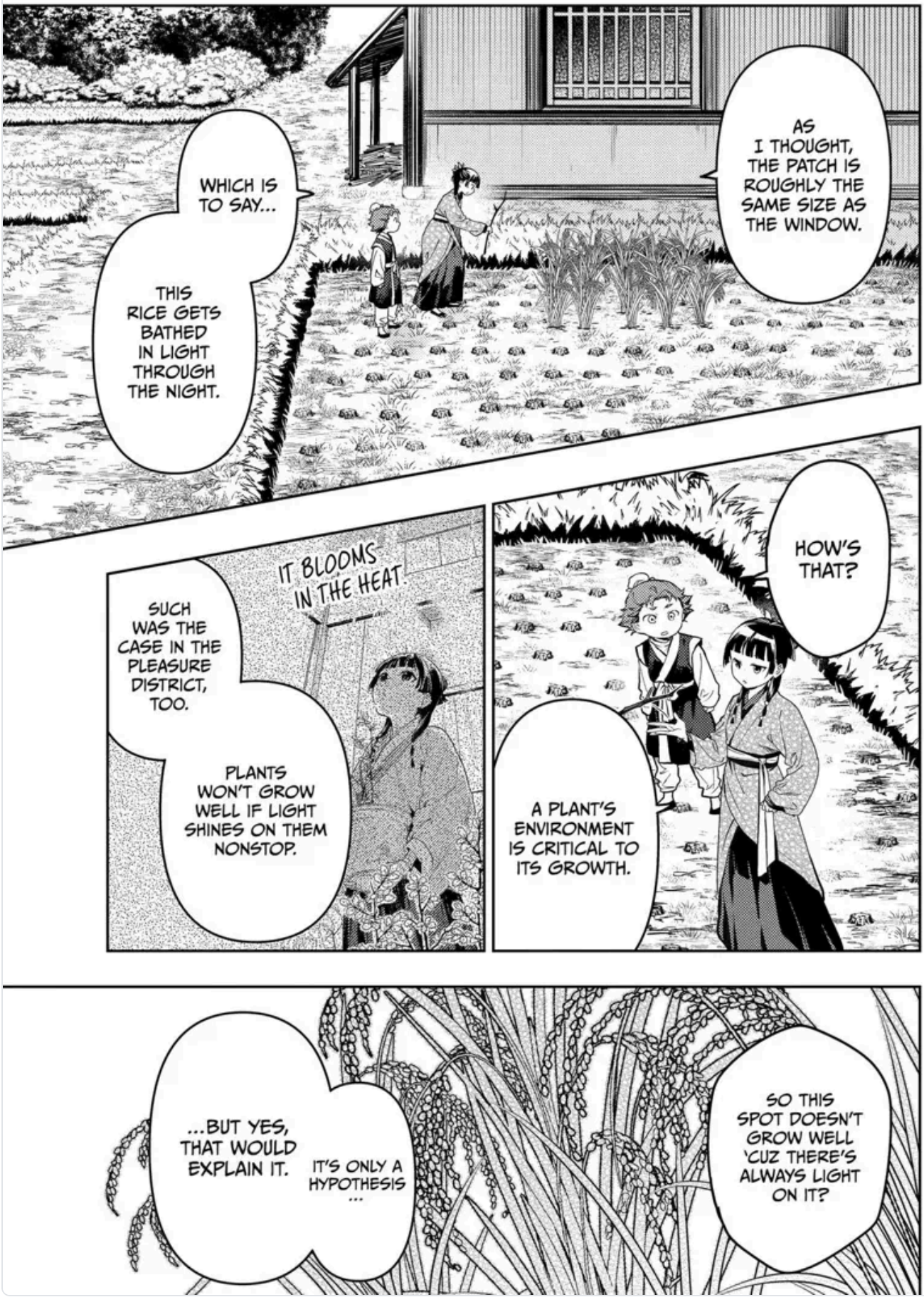
THEN JUST ZIP THROUGH THE OTHER ROOM'S BALCONIES.
AT THE VERY END...
YOU CAN DROP DOWN ONTO THE ROOM OF A WALKWAY CONNECTING THE BUILDINGS.

YOU KNOW SO MUCH.
NOBODY'S AROUND THIS TIME OF DAY.

NOT GONNA JUST LET YOU GO OFF ON YOUR OWN.
SQUEEEZE
WHY ARE YOU GOING, TOO?!
HEY!
HAAAH
UGH. OH WELL.
GOOD THING I HAVE SUCH A THIN FRAME.


YEP. THIS ONE SPOT JUST ISN'T GETTING THE NUTRIENTS IT NEEDS.

NO, NOT QUITE.
WHAT'D YA GRAB THAT FOR?
A STICK?


AS I THOUGHT, THE PATCH IS ROUGHLY THE SAME SIZE AS THE WINDOW.
WHICH IS TO SAY...
THIS RICE GETS BATHED IN LIGHT THROUGH THE NIGHT.
HOW'S THAT?
A PLANT'S ENVIRONMENT IS CRITICAL TO ITS GROWTH.
IT BLOOMS IN THE HEAT.
SUCH WAS THE CASE IN THE PLEASURE DISTRICT, TOO.
PLANTS WON'T GROW WELL IF LIGHT SHINES ON THEM NONSTOP.
SO THIS SPOT DOESN'T GROW WELL 'CUZ THERE'S ALWAYS LIGHT ON IT?
...BUT YES, THAT WOULD EXPLAIN IT.
IT'S ONLY A HYPOTHESIS ...

YOU GET MICE OUT HERE?
YEP.
WE TRAP 'EM, BUT THEY JUST KEEP COMING.
SUIREI MENTIONED USING ANIMALS IN HER TESTS. THOSE ANIMALS WERE RATS AND MICE.
IT WAS WRITTEN QUITE PLAINLY IN THE BOOKS.
THEN THE QUESTION IS...
...WHY IS A SUPPOSEDLY UNUSED STOREHOUSE...
...LIT UP ALL NIGHT LONG?
THOSE BOOKS ARE TOO HEAVY TO TRANSPORT FREELY.
THEY MUST ORIGINATE FROM THIS VERY VILLAGE.

ONE SEC!
AND IT'S LOCKED. OF COURSE.
THE DOOR.
CLACK
CLACK
CHAK
WHERE DID HE GET THAT WIRE?
CLACK
DELINQUENT LITTLE PUNK.
AND, OPEN!

CREEEAK
THE ROOM WITH THE WINDOW IS... THIS WAY.
STILL, HE DID HELP.
SPARKLE

AH...
WHAT?
CRK
CRK
CRK
SQUEAK
CRK
CRK
WHAT IS THIS...
...DOING HERE?

THESE ARE...
...DISASSEMBLED FEIFA.
CREEAK
...OH?

IS SOMEONE IN HERE?
DID SOMEONE FORGET TO SHUT THE DOOR?
NO, IT COULDN'T BE THAT.
CLACK
CLACK
CLACK
AND YET THE DOOR HANGS OPEN.
DID SOMEONE FORGET TO LOCK IT, THEN?
CLACK
CLACK
FWM
...OH, NO. IT'S HER.
?

IS THERE SOME ISSUE?
CRRRK
A SLIGHT ACCENT.
CLACK
CLACK
THE SPECIAL ENVOY!
MUST HAVE BEEN MY IMAGINATION.
NO. NOBODY HERE.

YOU SEE...
SWSH
FLIT

IT WAS ONLY A RAT.

WHAP
SUIREI.
YES.
MY DEEPEST APOLOGIES.
KEEP YOUR RATS LOCKED UP BETTER, WOULD YOU?

I'VE SEEN THIS BEFORE, HAVE I NOT?
OH?
SHIROU'S SON.
HMM.
CLACK
S-SO... SORRY...
HI
JOLT
...LADY SHENMEI.
CLACK
LET US BE ON OUR WAY.
THIS IS NO MORE THAN CHILDISH MISCHIEF.
MOTHER.

...LOULAN?
OF COURSE.
THE SHAPESHIFTING TANUKI.
PERHAPS IT WOULD BE BEST TO TAKE THIS ONE ALONG, THEN?
WHAT DO YOU SAY...
QUITE SO.
CLACK
CLACK
CLACK

...BUT THERE YOU HAVE IT. SHISUI WAS REALLY LOULAN ALL ALONG.
I'D HAD THE VAGUEST INKLING...
SHE DIDN'T SPEAK A SINGLE WORD DURING THE SPECIAL CLASS...
...BUT SHE MAY HAVE EXPECTED I'D RECOGNIZE HER AFTER MEETING HER THEN.
?
ACTUALLY, THE FACT THAT I DIDN'T NOTICE WHEN SHE CAUGHT THE CAT...
...MUST'VE EMBOLDENED HER TO KEEP MEETING ME AS SHISUI.

...HAD AN UNUSUAL PREDILECTION FOR INSECTS, BUT OTHERWISE...
I COULD RECOGNIZE HER HIGH-CLASS UPBRINGING AT EVERY TURN, AND YET...
...SHE WAS A COMPLETELY ORDINARY GIRL.
YEAH.
OH, YEESH!
...THE SHISUI I CAME TO KNOW...
SHE LOVED SHARING SNACKS AND GOSSIP WITH XIAOLAN.
AND SHE HAD ME COMPLETELY FOOLED.

SHE'LL NEED TO TASTE THE WHIP FOR THIS.
FIND A NICE POST TO TIE HER TO.
A HUNDRED LASHES SHOULD DO.
LADY SHENMEI—
WHAP!

AH, YES.
GRP
STMBL

JOLT
AND THE BOY WILL NEED TO BE DISCIPLINED, AS WELL.

I KNOW HER TYPE.
NOT GOOD.
SHE'S THE KIND OF NOBLE WHO LOOKS AT PEOPLE LIKE US...
...AND SEES NOTHING BUT WORMS.
MOTHER.
I RECALL YOU SAYING BEFORE...
...YOU WERE IN SEARCH OF A NEW APOTHECARY.

I HAVE NO UNDERSTANDING OF IT MYSELF ...
BUT THE MORE SHE EXPERIMENTS WITH HERBAL CONCOCTIONS, THE SLOWER SHE AGES.
FWM
DON'T LET HER FACE FOOL YOU. THIS WOMAN IS WELL INTO HER THIRTIES.

HMM
IS THAT SO?
I'VE NO DOUBT THIS APOTHECARY WILL EVENTUALLY CONCOCT AN ELIXIR FOR ETERNAL YOUTH.
IF SHE DOESN'T FAIL AND LOSE HER LIFE LIKE THAT LAST MAN...

ETERNAL YOUTH? WHAT?
SO BE IT, THEN.
WE CAN TAKE THIS... APOTHECARY WITH US.
IT'S NOT AS THOUGH SHE COULD DO ANY REAL WORK HERE, HOWEVER.
NOW THEN, LADY AYLA. SHALL WE CONTINUE OUR DISCUSSION?